

# MCC Committee on Women's Concerns

# report

Report No. 57, September-October 1984

## Women and Poverty

Women and poverty. The issue is not a new one. Women, and in many cases the children they nurture and care for, have long been among the poorest of the poor.

What is new is that more people seem to be aware of the problem. No longer do we consider only the problems of women in the so-called Third World. More and more we are confronted with the reality that the policies of the U.S. and Canadian governments condemn many of the women and children who are our next-door neighbors to a less-than-adequate subsistence lifestyle. Some programs for women and children in the United States, for example, have been severely curtailed or eliminated completely as more and more money is budgeted for military spending.

In this issue of *Report*, we have tried to compile some of the facts and figures that paint the picture of poverty among women in North America. We have also tried to go beyond those statistical patterns to describe the impact on women's everyday lives.

I worked for 10 years in grassroots programs that sought to meet the needs of the poor—first in Wichita, Kan., and later in Jefferson County, Colo., and Elkhart, Ind. During this time, I became increasingly aware of the links between feminism, racism and militarism. I began to realize that cuts in human services programs affected the lives of real women and children.

I began to wish for a clear outcry from Christian women and men—crying out at the injustice of all this.



I am still waiting I am waiting to hear these words from many lips:

"Jesus does not want anyone, of any age, color or gender, to suffer poverty. Jesus does not want me to live a rich, full, healthy life while my sisters worry about how they will feed, clothe and sustain themselves and their children. In the name of Jesus this must stop!"

I learned more than facts and figures in my 10 years of work. I learned to know individual poor women and realized how alike we are. They have the same needs, wants and hopes I do. They wish for a good life for the children around them as I do. They have their good and bad qualities just as I do.

I hope this issue of *Report* will touch you and push

you to speak out. I hope you will learn some facts you did not know before and use them to work for change. I hope you will feel with the women whose stories are told here and that you will be motivated to do something about what is happening to them and to all of us.

Most of all, I hope you will come to believe that as Arlene Inouye-Matsuo says in her article in this issue, "We need each other."

*Jan Lugibihl, compiler of this issue, graduated from Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminaries in May with a master of arts in peace studies. She has just begun a three-year MCC term in the Philippines ministering to "hospitality girls."*

## **Poverty in Canada: One Woman's Story**

by Beth Poirer

Welfare can be a godsend when you have nowhere else to turn.

They are there if you're between jobs, waiting forever for unemployment checks to start, or if you're in real need—as long as you don't have a bank account, life insurance or any other kind of assets. They give you an allowance to exist on, and help with some monthly expenses, but they don't pay for your phone, car, or any outstanding bills.

You do get a clothing allowance, but by the time you've paid as many bills as you can, you've spent the entire clothing allowance as well as most of the food money. Prescription drugs, health insurance, emergency dental work and a percentage of the cost of eyeglasses are covered. For this we must be grateful.

As for food, you don't starve in Canada, but there are times when you're mighty hungry. It's hard to give your child the last piece of bread and say, "That's all." You gain weight because you eat lots of cheap, starchy, greasy food.

Fresh fruits and vegetables are a really extravagant treat. Most nuts and cheeses are out of your price range. Milk is a problem when you have a baby who can't drink the powdered variety. Even the powdered skim takes a chunk out of the food allowance. Buying in bulk is great and it's cheaper, but the pennies often don't stretch that far.

Mother's Allowance is a bit better. You get more money and medical needs are paid for more fully. If you have a caring worker, you may even be able to get some essential appliances, like a fridge or a washer. A vacuum cleaner is considered a luxury even if you live in a carpeted apartment.

You get a clothing allowance for back-to-school children. That is great, but I could never figure out whether to get them a winter coat and boots, or jeans, sweaters, underwear, socks and shoes.

My kids have missed school trips, rollerskating, movies, high school dances, trips to the beach, camping, fishing, ice skating and extracurriculars because of money.

One day my youngest son was sent home from school to change clothes. The principal phoned me and said they wanted him dressed better. He had too many patches on his jeans. It didn't matter that the jeans were clean and neatly patched. He missed a week of school while I tried to get some money together to buy him a new pair. Then the principal was after me because he was missing too much school.

### **The Working Poor**

Another group to consider is the working poor. In some cases they make a bit more money than people on welfare, but there are no benefits. They bring home a paycheck that is gone the next day. The transportation to and from work has to be paid as well as the upkeep of the car. Quite often they have to drive an unfit car.

They work long hard hours and don't seem to get anywhere. They take whatever job they can just to stay off welfare.

Their basic medical care isn't too bad because the government will pay their health insurance premium if they can't. That takes care of visiting the doctor, but not the prescribed medications. Sure, most of them get better without medicine, but they either have to work while sick or take time off without pay. What could be cleared up in a few days with medication goes on for weeks without it. They pray that complications won't set in.

Dental care is strictly out unless you can go to the hospital and have the offending tooth pulled. Usually they give a pain killer and send you home with instructions to "see your family dentist." A friend of mine had a dental checkup. It cost \$97. The working poor can't afford that but the only other choice is to let the teeth rot and hope they fall out themselves.

We would be a lot worse off if it weren't for low-income housing. The rent is geared to one-fourth of your income. This means that if your income is decreased, the rent is lowered accordingly. By the same token, if your income is increased, so is your rent...

To the working poor, people say, "What do you mean, you can't afford this or that? You're working! What do you do with your money?"



The worker and his family get to the point of thinking, "What's the use?" In the meantime, the bills pile up and everyone wants their money. They seem to have nowhere to turn. A lot of government agencies won't look at them because "they are working." The temptation to steal food or something to sell to get food is great...

### A Long Black Tunnel

Poverty is looking into the future and seeing a long black tunnel with no light. Hating to get up in the morning to face more anger and frustration. Cutting your family members' hair and making a mess of it. Not being able to say "Life is good."

Poverty is trying to keep your house clean with water and dish soap because cleaning supplies are too expensive. Sweeping your carpet with a broom because you don't have a vacuum cleaner and knowing the carpet still isn't clean. Always being dressed with clothes from the thrift shop. Putting cardboard insoles in your shoes and newspaper in your boots in the winter. Thinking of suicide at Christmas but not being able to carry it out, because your family would suffer more.

Poverty does things to love too. It steals from husbands and wives, children and parents and friends. You can't accept dinner at someone's house because you can't afford to return the favor. Soon, you aren't asked anymore.

You have trouble relating to people who are better than you because you can't help resenting the fact that they have and you have not. At the same time, the people as poor as you are a constant reminder of what your situation is. Therefore, you are lonely a lot...

Being human, you have to blame someone for your situation. If your spouse loved you, he or she would get you out of this mess. If God loved you, God would put an end to poverty. If the government cared, they would create better jobs, and so on.

### Poverty and Dignity

Poverty leaves you with very little dignity, if any. A few years ago, I had to get my glasses changed. I was on a Mother's Allowance, so I took the necessary forms and went to an optician in a local mall. I told the man what I needed and gave him the forms to fill out.

He brought out seven pairs of frames (there were hundreds in the store) and said they were the "welfare" frames and I was to choose one. There was one pair that wasn't too bad, so I took them. They put glass lenses in those frames, but the lenses were very heavy and the glasses kept falling off and eventually broke. It was three years before I was given assistance to get a new pair.

I will never forget how I was treated. The frames weren't fitted properly and no time whatever was taken with me. I was treated like WELFARE.

### Dreams, Goals...and Poverty

Poverty is unreal but reality. It's like a bad nightmare you never wake up from. The hassles, headaches, anger and heartaches never seem to lessen or end. Eventually you give up your dreams and your goals because there doesn't seem to be a way to reach them.

I have two children who are Grade 12 graduates. They both have their careers planned—but no money to take the necessary courses. They must work (if they can) in the "working poor" bracket. There is no way to save money for college.

Therefore there is a good chance they will be working poor, trying to support families for many years to come. Their high school education means nothing. Will they lose sight of their dreams and goals through no fault of their own?

**"It's hard to give your child the last piece of bread and say, 'That's all.' "**

People say, "You could do better if you tried. You don't have to live like that." Obviously they haven't had to just exist, or if they have, they have been a part of the lucky few. We survive as best we can.

We don't want handouts. We are extremely humiliated by charity. We want to be able to do for ourselves and our families. We want to laugh and be grateful for life. We want to enjoy the love and friendship of our families and friends. We want to be a credit to them and our communities. We want to be able to help others. We want to be able to help our children develop their own personalities, and not pick up on our bitterness, anger and discontent.

Poverty has taken over in our lives. It dictates who and what we are and takes our choices away. It gives nothing positive in return.

*Beth Poirier is a participant in Live and Learn, a support group for low-income mothers run by the House of Friendship, Kitchener, Ontario. She writes of her personal experiences of different kinds of poverty and social assistance.*

## The Feminization of Poverty:

### A U.S. Critique

by Cheryl Martin

In 1983 the U.S. poverty rate rose to 15.2 percent. This was the fifth consecutive increase and the highest rate since 1965. Of 35.3 million "official poor," nearly half (47.5 percent) are persons in female-headed families. In 1959 only 26.3 percent of those in poverty fit that description. If this trend continues, it is projected that by the year 2000 nearly all those living in poverty will be women and their dependent children.

Two basic factors are contributing to this "feminization of poverty." One involves societal shifts toward more divorces and an increase in births to unmarried women.

The other factor encompasses a number of deeply rooted inequities related to women and the workplace, such as how much women are paid for what they do, what types of jobs females are encouraged to take, and the treatment women receive on the job. Black and Hispanic women face the additional handicap of race discrimination.

**"In 1981, only 35 percent of the 8.4 million single mothers received any child support payment at all."**

When a marriage ends in divorce, children are much more often given over to the custody of the mother than the father. If a woman has never worked outside the home, she will find it difficult to use her skills in a job which pays well enough to support a family. Even if a woman has been working outside the home, her earnings (on average) will comprise about one-third of her family's income. Two-thirds of the family income leaves with the father.

Theoretically, child support payments should help reduce the inequity. Yet in 1981, only 35 percent of the 8.4 million women raising children with an absent father received any child support payment at all. Among those who did receive support, the median amount was \$2,100 per year.

The number of single mothers who were never married doubled in the last 20 years. These women, especially those who are teenagers, significantly reduce their chances of completing their education or gaining job experience.

Those single mothers—whether divorced, widowed or never married—who do find jobs face the same situation all women do. Jobs traditionally held by females pay less than those traditionally done by males—and women are consistently channeled into those vocations. Once on the job, a woman encounters the possibilities of promotion discrimination and sexual harassment.

### Welfare and the Poverty Line

Those unable to work or find a job face a worse prospect: welfare. Contrary to popular myths about "welfare queens," even combined payments from programs such as Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) and food stamps don't bring recipient families up to the poverty level (\$10,178 for a family of four in 1983).

For example, in 1982 a mother and three children in Texas with no other income received \$141 in AFDC and \$233 worth of food stamps each month. That family's total income equalled 53 percent of the poverty line for that year. Benefits vary from state to state; assistance to a similar family in Massachusetts put them at 98 percent of the poverty line. Most states fall somewhere between.

Families dependent on public benefits have had their income slashed deeply in the last four years due to budget cuts enacted by Congress at the request of the Reagan Administration. Before 1981 a significant number of poor women were able to combine salaries and benefits to bring their families above the poverty line.

Today, however, a woman has to weigh the loss of benefits against work-related expenses such as child care and transportation and the additional loss of medical benefits when AFDC is cut off. In addition, taxes for those with low incomes have risen substantially. In 1975 a family of four paid no taxes until they were 22 percent above the poverty line. By 1984 a similar family with income at the poverty level was paying 9.6 percent of its earnings in income and payroll taxes.

For a woman facing the prospect of a low-paying job, the trade-off often isn't worth it. Despite this fact, studies show that few families rely solely on AFDC over long periods of time. The majority of people receiving welfare either cannot work or would prefer to work if they could find jobs.

**"Changes in the systems which promote economic inequities sorely need to be made, and the church needs to be addressing that as a justice issue."**

The answer to economic self-sufficiency for women is not to further reduce benefits so as to "force" them to work. Rather, both aspects of the feminization of poverty—the increasing instability of the family and the career handicaps women face—must be addressed.

## Role of Church

Here the church has a unique role. Changes in the systems which promote economic inequities sorely need to be made, and the church needs to be addressing that as a justice issue.

After continued efforts, legislation passed this year to enforce collection of child support payments and to improve pensions for women. Much more needs to be done to ensure that women's job opportunities are not limited and to ensure that women receive salaries equitable to those men receive.

The church must also see that the increasing feminization of poverty is not addressed solely as an economic issue. A stable family environment not only

contributes to economic stability but also helps provide the emotional and spiritual support people need to fulfill the potential God created them with. In the process, however, we must examine the assumptions about women's roles which have helped create the economic problems an increasing number of women face today.

At stake is the quality of life for large numbers of women and their children.

*Cheryl Martin is a legislative research assistant with MCC U.S. Peace Section's Washington Office, dealing with issues of poverty, criminal justice, civil rights and ecology. She is a graduate of Fresno Pacific College, Fresno, CA.*

## Poverty in the United States:

### Angela, Vernice and Ruth

by Miriam Voran

This past year I worked at Deborah's Place, a shelter for homeless women trying to return to independent living. In Women's Studies classes at college, I had read the theories about women's oppression, and had seen some examples in my own life. Now I wanted to learn the stories of women more visibly broken and marred, and I hoped to help them reclaim their own lives.

At Deborah's Place, I soon realized with a jolt that being female was often the only common link between myself and the women who came to the shelter. Many had lived in poor communities all their lives. All were homeless because of some personal crisis which was beyond my experience.



As I listened to these women's stories, I began to see feminist theories played out in the tattered patterns of their lives. Because of their sex, these people had inherited a vulnerable position in society. They had

been abused—sexually, economically and psychologically. They had received layer upon layer of the oppression which marks us all. For them, the precarious balance finally tipped.

*"As I listened to these women's stories, I began to see feminist theories played out in the tattered patterns of their lives."*

### Angela's Story

Angela's life illustrates the violence of patriarchy's degradation of women. Her professional career was advancing well until a brutal rape so disoriented her that she lost her job and then her apartment.

Homelessness was the least of Angela's problems. Late into the night I listened to her struggle with rage over the senselessness of her rape. When excruciating migraines left her stumbling in total confusion I led her to the emergency room and stood helplessly by as doctors shot drugs into her body.

I was challenged by Angela's proud and determined spirit to rebuild her life, and also shared her anger at a system which allows women to be considered fit objects for beastial attacks.

### Vernice's Story

Vernice came from a family much poorer than Angela's. Already at age 22 she appeared bound to continue a life of public assistance checks and low-income housing. Her first pregnancy at 15 forced her to leave school. With two more children born in the next four years, she never returned to school.

By the time Vernice reached Deborah's Place, the court had placed the three children in the custody of relatives. Finally, Vernice could train for a job and she completed a clerical program. With certificate in hand,

she began hunting for work. But when the court awarded her custody of the three children, she eagerly accepted them and moved, first into a family shelter, then into subsidized housing.

I watched Vernice leave with mixed emotions. Her family was reunited—she could again mother the children she so dearly loved. Yet the opportunities which had opened during her brief period of freedom were slipping away. Vernice would spend her days at home with the children.

Maybe, she told me, she would get a job once they were in school. But for now, she knew the demands of her kids and the difficulty of finding day care would prevent her from working. And I knew that if Vernice ever did return to work, her skills and experience would limit her to the type of low-paying jobs traditionally held by women. Women's role had sealed Vernice into the poverty in which she was born.

*"I was challenged by Angela's proud and determined spirit to rebuild her life, and also shared her anger at a system which allows women to be considered fit objects for beastial attacks."*

#### Ruth's Story

Ruth was an older woman, perhaps foreshadowing Vernice's path. In Ruth's life I saw clearly the tragic outcome of women's socialization to care always for others and never for ourselves.

At age 47 Ruth had reared three children, now all grown and either unable or unwilling to support their mother. For years she had headed the family, working as a maid to feed and clothe the children.

At Deborah's Place, her hard-working and determined spirit could have been an exit ticket from the shelter. With limited skills it was hard for Ruth to find work. Yet every Saturday morning she walked to the Washington Post and heaved and shoved papers for 10 hours, inserting the Sunday sections. The money would have added up, had she kept it in her own bank account.

But again, there were other demands on her life. Her friend Joe needed help, and many of Ruth's checks went to him. Ruth probably hoped to move in with Joe when her four-month residency at the shelter ended, but by that time, Joe had found another woman.

Again Ruth faced the future with little resources to show for her hard work, and no means to secure her own life.

#### Vulnerable to the Extreme

The lives of Angela, Vernice and Ruth reveal the vulnerable position of women in our society, carried to its terrible extreme. With the outcome painted in stark relief against the shelter walls, I saw so clearly the

crimes against women. I had the evidence I needed to encourage the fight to change things that we often consider acceptable and commonplace.

Women objectified to sell cars is okay; a statistic on rape is unfortunate, but a part of life. But the violence which shattered Angela's world represents an outrage toward which no one can remain silent.

I may fight the traditional roles of mother and secretary as a limit to my personal fulfillment. But for Vernice such socialization means a no-exit from poverty.

Women's socialization to care for others is a psychological struggle for myself; perhaps for others it is the loving spirit which maintains the peace of the family. But when I see Ruth out again on the street, I realize that something is deeply wrong when human beings lack the self-respect and confidence to assume responsibility for their own selves, when their culture has socialized them to behave as perpetual children.

But I would have been blind if I had received only confirmation of my college feminist persuasions during my year with the women at Deborah's. I soon realized that their sex was only one of the many barriers they faced. Most women at the shelter were trapped in cycles of poverty, and in the problems of being black in white America.

My awareness of women's oppression provided a point of entry for understanding the other injustices of society. Now I became the privileged and the victimizer, and was forced to own in myself the same guilt which as a feminist I have pointed out to men.

*"With the outcome painted in stark relief against the shelter walls, I saw so clearly the crimes against women. I had the evidence I needed to encourage the fight to change things that we so often consider acceptable and commonplace."*

The stories I heard at Deborah's Place both intensified my feminism and placed it in the context of other oppressions in society. I saw the economic implications of what in my young middle class existence had only been restrictions to personal fulfillment. I also realized the connections between the barriers faced by women and those encountered by blacks and the poor. And as I leave, I know I can never totally close the door on the world which has been uncovered.

*Miriam Voran, Washington, D.C., holds a psychology major from Goshen College. She just finished a year at Deborah's Place with Lutheran Voluntary Service, and now works as an administrative assistant at Wider Opportunities for Women. This organization trains poor women in non-traditional skills.*

## A Minority Woman's Voice

by Arlene Inouye-Matsuo

I believe that the concern for women in poverty has the potential to mobilize all women (minority and white, rich and poor) together like never before to fight against our oppression.

In the past, white women benefitted from the privilege and status of being white (at the expense of people of color). Currently they have been brought down and equalized to some extent with minority women. White women have found that when the man is no longer in the home, they have suddenly been devalued. Perhaps their present situation will help white women to see and address the unjust power structure of this country and the need to fight against all forms of oppression.

However, for minority and white women to fully come together as persons and struggle together, it will take more than the fact that we are both victims of oppression. It will take honest dialogue and a coming together at a deeper level. We need to care about each other, to feel with each other and to be healed and reconciled in our differences.

The barrier of racism must be torn down. As was stated earlier, race is **the** significant factor that has dichotomized and separated minority and white women in our country's history. For the most part, white women have yet to embrace and take upon themselves the dual oppression of minority status and to confront their own racial prejudices...

I have come to the conclusion that often white feminists **sincerely** think they are helping minority women (and therefore could not possibly be racist) in their token responses of charity. They also seem to believe that they are reaching out to minority women by recruiting them to their feminist meetings while, at the same time, ignoring minority concerns.

There is very little dialogue initiated among feminists themselves to seriously talk about, much less work



through their racism. Also, the substance of feminist rhetoric of equality is not lived out by working for basic systemic changes that are minority women's priorities, such as welfare reform, desegregation, bilingual education, immigration laws, affordable housing, child care, and better working conditions and pay in the garment industry, restaurants and factories.

Working together as sisters...means seeing our struggle as a united one, and working for those changes where they are most needed and have the most dehumanizing impact on women. It also requires the embracing of our equality as persons—and as persons of worth. We need compassion for one another that enables us to go beyond our own situation to the lives of others...

*Arlene Inouye-Matsuo is director of the Asian Pacific American Women's Center in Los Angeles and a Christian feminist. The above piece is excerpted from the Oct./Nov. 1983 issue of The Asianamerican Journey.*

## For Further Reading

*Beyond the Myths: the families helped by the AFDC program.* \$1.75 from Center on Social Welfare Policy and Law, 95 Madison Ave., New York, N.Y. 10016.

*End Results: The Impact of Federal Policies Since 1980 on Low Income Americans.* \$2.00 from Interfaith Action for Economic Justice, 110 Maryland Ave. NE, Washington, D.C. 20002.

Harrington, Michael. *The New American Poverty.* Holt, Rinehart & Winston.

Roberts, Paula. "The Feminization of Poverty," a five-part series in the June-October issues of *Foodlines*. Write Food Research and Action Center, 1319 F St., NW, Washington, D.C., 20004.

Rousseau, Ann Marie. *Shopping Bag Ladies.* Princeton: Pilgrim Press, 1981.

Sider, Ronald J. *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger: A Biblical Study.* Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 1977.

Sider, Ronald J., ed. *Cry Justice, the Bible on Hunger and Poverty.* Paulist Press, 1980.

Sivard, Ruth Leger. *World Military and Social Expenditures.* World Priorities, Inc., Box 1003, Leesburg, VA. 22075.

Stallard, Karin, Barbara Ehrenreich and Holly Sklar. *Poverty in the American Dream: Women and Children First.* \$3.75 from Institute for Policy Studies, 1901 Q Street, NW, Washington, D.C. 20009.

For other resources see:

*Resources on World Hunger, Responsible Living and Other Global Issues: An Annotated Bibliography.* MCC (U.S.) Development Education Office.

## Letters

*Report* is always such a welcome messenger! I wouldn't miss these regular readings: always encouraging, enlightening with *yeast*. —Erna J. Fast, Hutchinson, Kan.

I really appreciated the article "Friendship through Correspondence" by Jean Kraybill in the July-August 1984 issue of *Report*. Speaking as someone who has moved a great deal in the last few years, I can only agree wholeheartedly that keeping in touch with friends by mail has been a constant support—sometimes my only support—when I have just moved to a new place and know no one.

I think that in our increasingly mobile society, letter writing could be a great support and comfort to many people. It is unfortunate, therefore, that so few people seem inclined to be bothered.

It really hurts me when someone I consider a close friend says when I am moving "Oh, don't expect any letters for me—I'm not a good letterwriter." Not taking the time to write (it really doesn't take much time) means, effectively, the end of the friendship this way. On the other hand, some friendships have really only blossomed when I have moved—those with people who are a bit shy in talking but like to write.

For me, letter writing has been a discipline and a great pleasure. It has been a source of strength and joy, a time to pray for distant friends, and the only way I have of continuing many valuable friendships. Receiving letters is also good, an added blessing.

Allow me to give a loud and heartfelt second to Jean Kraybill in her suggestion that more people take up this "lost art."

—Michelle Bull, Toronto

## News and Verbs

**Zilla Marshall**, Goshen College student from Jamaica, W.I. took first place in the 1984 C. Henry Smith Oratorical Contest with a speech entitled "Hunger." She stated, "We speak of world peace, but the struggle for peace among the poor is hopeless; for when hunger rules, peace cannot prevail."

Second-place winner was **Jane Funk**, student at Bethel College, with her oration on "Violent Games People Play." She noted that video games "almost all promote killing and violence in one way or another."

**Miriam F. Book**, Business and Professional Women's Secretary for the Women's Missionary and Service Commission of the Mennonite Church, is in the process of organizing regional groupings of Mennonite professional women. This is being done through the appointment of regional coordinators, who will then call area meetings to discuss topics of mutual interest and to provide a setting in which professional women can stay connected with each other.

"Wellness—Abundant Living" is the title of the 1984-85 WMSC devotional guide, written by **Ann Raber**. Raber has been a psychology teacher and counsellor, and is presently training leaders in congregations to work with the Mennonite Mutual Aid's *Wellness Manual*. The September-December portion of WMSC guide is printed in the August 1984 issue of the WMSC *Voice*.

The Church of Scotland got into the "gender of God" debate at its recent general assembly. Participants heard a report of an 11-member panel (seven women and four men) which maintained that the characteristics attributed to God in the Bible resemble "everything that is best in the female way of being human." The panel was divided, however, on whether "the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" could be addressed as "God our Mother." The panel was appointed by the 1982 assembly after the phrase "God our Mother" was included in a prayer at an official meeting of the woman's guild.—From *Christian Century*, May 23, 1984.

Women, who make up more than half the world's population, work two-thirds of all working hours for only 10 percent of the world's total wages. In the United States, a third of the 8.4 million female-headed households live below the government's poverty line; the figure rises to more than two-thirds for Black and Hispanic women. The picture is bleakest for elderly women; their median income is \$4,577 overall and \$3,528 for Third World women. Five million more women and children live in poverty now than three years ago and if present trends were to continue unchanged, female-headed households would make up 100 percent of those below official poverty levels by 2000. Those statistics were among the testimony presented by Joan Swan of the American Friends Service Committee to the New York City Council Committee on Women earlier this year.

MCC will establish a personnel policy committee to address, among other things, issues of particular concern to female employees, such as maternity/paternity benefits, child care, recruitment procedures and flexible work hours. The committee will be established due to joint action of the MCC-U.S. and MCC executive committees at their Sept. 21 deliberations in Akron, Pa., on the recommendation of an ad hoc group of the Committee on Women's Concerns.

Oxfam-America is sponsoring a women's study tour to India January 11-26, 1985. The tour's purpose is to lay a foundation for partnership and understanding between women active in grassroots social change movements in the United States and India. Oxfam is striving for a tour group that will reflect the racial and economic diversity of women organizing for progressive changes in the United States. Participants will be expected to engage in follow-up outreach and educational activities, such as giving interviews, writing articles and talking to groups. Cost is \$1,950, with some partial scholarships available. Applications, due by Nov. 23, are available from Betsy Ringel, Oxfam-America, 115 Broadway, Boston, Mass. 02116. Phone (617) 482-1211.

Goshen College encourages women to apply for the following three openings:

- Tenure-track faculty position in physics. Desired qualifications include commitment to Christian faith, doctorate, and interest in solid-state research. Teaching will include physics, physical science and physical chemistry. Send letter of application (naming three references), resume and transcripts to Willard Martin, Dean, Goshen College, Goshen, Ind. 46526 by Dec. 15.
- Director of information services. Duties are to supervise the college's external communication in news, publications and other channels. Qualifications are a master's degree in journalism or related field (or equivalent experience) and a commitment to Christian higher education. Send letter, resume, work samples and transcripts to John A. Lapp, Provost, as soon as possible.
- Director of alumni relations. The director plans and manages alumni direct mail communication, phone-a-thons, and services such as reunions, area meetings and travel programs. The director also writes and edits public information materials for the College Relations Division. Qualifications include commitment to Christian faith, bachelor's degree, strong communication skills and relevant experience. Send letter (naming three references), resume, transcripts and writing samples to Ron Gunden, Director of College Relations by Dec. 1.

**Muriel Thiessen Stackley**, former *Report* editor from 1979-1982, was recently named news editor of the General Conference Mennonite Church news service in Newton, Kan. Muriel is a frequent contributor to many church periodicals and has served in various editorial capacities for the General Conference, including assistant general editor from 1973-1979. She holds a bachelors degree from Bluffton College and a masters from the University of Kansas.

Two new slidesets are available from the WMSC (Mennonite Church): "Mennonite Women: Building Together as Living Stones" and "Children of Peace." Order from: Barbara Reber, WMSC, Box 1245, Elkhart, IN 46515.

The **Annotated Guide to Women's Periodicals in the United States and Canada** lists over 250 North American publications. Each publication is briefly reviewed by category and indexed by title and geographically. Individual subscriptions to the 52-page bound **Annotated Guide** are \$12 for two issues or \$6.50 for single copies. For institutions and libraries, the rates are \$20 and \$10, respectively. Order from: Annotated Guide, c/o N.S.I.W.S., Box E-94, Earlham College, Richmond, Ind. 47374.

After three years of vigorous debate, the Peace and Social Concerns Commission of the Canadian Conference of the Brethren in Christ has adopted a paper on abortion that states, "We believe that abortion, that is, the deliberate termination of a pregnancy, violates

the sanctity of human life except where a mother's physical life is seriously threatened."

Reporting on the paper's acceptance, PSC secretary Pauline Nigh Hogan said that, whereas debate had been expected on this ideological precept, what was most surprising was that "the most radical part of the paper passed without comment." Sections of the paper commit churches to community involvement to help women facing unwanted pregnancies—with counselling, funding for supportive services and influencing lawmakers to support social services funding.

"No one jumped up or down about those sections which commit us to a course of action on an issue we have hitherto ignored," Nigh Hogan commented in the summer 1984 issue of "Peace and Justice Newsletter."

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The Christian Movement for Peace has recently published a high school curriculum unit on "Women and Human Wholeness." The unit is one part of a five-part series entitled **People Living for Justice**. Other units treat the topics of militarism, work, economic justice and human dignity.

The Ontario-based organization says the series is intended for senior religion or social studies classes but may be used as a supplement to youth ministry programs or adapted for adult groups.

Each unit costs \$38, plus \$2 postage, and contains lesson plans, resources and handouts. Some of the subjects dealt with in the "Women and Human Wholeness" unit include sex role stereotyping, language and sexism, advertising images of male and female, violence against women, interpretation of Biblical stories and Third World women.

For more information, write or call Christian Movement for Peace, 427 Bloor Street West, Toronto, Ontario M5S 1X7. Phone (416) 921-2360.

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A Colorado women's group is enlisting the artistic ability of women everywhere to create a ribbon for peace—to be over a mile in length! The ribbon, to consist of yard-long panels, will encircle the Pentagon in August 1985, the 40th anniversary of the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombings.

The group invites women to express their peace longings in picture, poem, prayer or Scripture verse and to translate them onto a cloth panel—using quilt, applique, batik, embroidery, paint, print, silkscreen, tie-die, hook, weave, iron-on or needlework.

To learn more about the project write to The Ribbon, Box 2206, Denver, Colo. 80201.

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"One reason we don't grow," said **Karin Granberg-Michaelson** of the Evangelical Women's Caucus, is that "Christian feminism forces such incredibly costly issues" for women whose churches and families are hostile to the ideas aired at EWC biennial conferences. Over 500 participants met this summer at Wellesley College. The conference reaffirmed unanimously EWC's continued support for the Equal Rights Amendment, but assigned to a task force for "further study" resolutions against the arms race and nuclear weapons. The next conference will be held in Fresno in July 1986.

The *Report* mailing list has been shared on a one-time basis with **Daughters of Sarah**, a Christian feminist publication wishing to increase its circulation among Mennonite women. *Report* readers should expect a mailing from **Daughters** sometime in the near future.

The MCC-U.S. women's desk has been receiving some inquiries regarding funding sources for women's projects, such as for a battered women's shelter. Are readers aware of foundation grants or other sources of funding specifically designated for women's projects in North America, or methods/directories to scout out such grants? If so, please send such information to Emily Will, MCC, 21 South 12th Street, Akron, Pa. 17501.

In August the Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada voted overwhelmingly to allow the ordination of women and permit them to use the title "reverend." Previously Pentecostal women could obtain a ministerial allowance which allowed them the privileges of male ministers—but not the title.

"Enduring Comforts—an exhibit of Mennonite quilts made before 1940" was displayed at the Bethel College Fine Arts Center, North Newton, Kan. Sept. 28 through Oct. 28.

The Ministry of Community and Social Services of the Ontario government has introduced new initiatives to protect and assist battered women and their children. Over \$10 million will be spent this fiscal year, and \$6.7 million of that represents new funding. The network of transition houses will be expanded and a network of "safe-homes" will be introduced. The attorney general also recently appointed 50 specially-designated government legal officers to deal with domestic assault matters.

"The church has frequently misused the Bible, turning it into an instrument of oppression. It has been used to sanction some of the worst evils of history—war, slavery, racism and discrimination against women, among others. This tragic truth should cause the church to weep." So said Chevis F. Horne in an article entitled "Women in Ministry" in the October 1984 issue of the Baptist publication, *Light*.

The MCC Committee on Women's Concerns welcomes two new members: **Irene Loewen** and **Joan Gerig**. The duo was elected at the U.S. Peace Section's annual fall meeting in Berne, Ind. in early November. Irene lives in Fresno, Calif. and will represent U.S. Mennonite Brethren. Joan, from Chicago, will serve as the U.S. General Conference representative.

Photos in this issue were taken by Jim King, MCC Information Services.

**Carol Ringer**, Winnipeg has been elected president of the Women's Inter-Church Council of Canada. The council, with membership from 11 denominations, promotes World Day of Prayer, devotional life for women, and focuses on various social issues concerning women in Canada and beyond.

## Looking Ahead

Forthcoming Reports will focus on:

Nov. - Dec. 1984  
Jan. - Feb. 1985  
March - April 1985  
May - June 1985

Women and Body Image  
Black and Minority Women  
Women and Plurality  
Women and the Special Child

*REPORT* is published bi-monthly by the MCC Committee on Women's Concerns. The committee, formed in 1973, believes that Jesus Christ teaches equality of all persons. It strives to promote this belief through sharing information, concerns and ideas relating to problems and issues which affect the status of women in church and society. Articles and views presented in *REPORT* do not necessarily reflect official positions of the Committee on Women's Concerns. Correspondence should be addressed to Editor Sue Clemmer Steiner, Apt. 3, 87 Westmount Rd. North, Waterloo, Ontario, Canada N2L 5G5.

To subscribe or change your address, please send your old address with your new address to: MCC, 21 South 12th Street, Akron, PA 17501. Allow 2-4 weeks for address change. Contributions welcome.

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